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shall be realized, and the new Jerusalem will be seen "coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

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THE CONCEPTION OF POSSIBILITY IN ITS RELATION TO CONDUCT.

When, in deliberation, we have several alternative lines of action before us, we naturally regard all of them as "possible." We may be forced to choose and, again, the number of alternatives may be limited, but out of these we are left free to choose whichever we prefer. All lines are open; they become closed only in the moment in which we select and carry out one. It is only as the selected alternative becomes actual that the others cease to be possible, which means that as soon and so long as our will is determined one way, no other way is possible; but as long as our will is still undetermined, and "our minds not yet made up," many ways are possible. Decision consists in the realization of one possibility to the exclusion of others. And though decision always operates under conditions which we accept, and either cannot or will not alter, yet within these fixed conditions it produces a *new* result. These conditions are not merely external and circumstantial. They include our characters and our habits; they take perhaps the form of some moral principle to which in our choice we wish to be true. Yet, thus stated as conditions, these are abstract and seem to possess no determining force. It is hard to say in what sense character, habit and principle are real, except as realized in act. And thus we feel that the result of our choice—in spite of the conditions to which it is subject—cannot be fixed and determined beforehand, but only *comes to be determined* in the moment of decision. We refuse to believe that the alternative possibilities which our decision now makes impossible, were impossible from the start, and seemed open only by an illusion born of ignorance.

Prior to decision—that is our belief apart from sophistication by theories—the result is undetermined, not because of the incompleteness of our knowledge of the conditions, *but simply because the decision which determines it has not yet taken place*. And by this we mean not merely that several *actions* are physically possible if we choose them, but that it is possible to *choose* one out of several. In this sense we say that it is possible for us to decide for one or other of several alternatives.

Again, it is in this sense that we say retrospectively that it was “possible” for us to act otherwise than we did. For “to act” here is used for “to decide” or “to will.” We mean that we could have willed differently; that our actual volition might have been other than it was. It is this consciousness which supplies the sting to most of our regrets and to all our repentance and without which it would be mere mockery to grieve at the loss of an irreparable opportunity. We do, of course, find out *post eventum* many mistakes, and we say: if only I had known that at the time! But when, reproaching ourselves, *e. g.*, for yielding to a temptation, we say that we could have done otherwise, there is no such qualifying “if” expressed or implied. It is almost as if we wished to fly in the face of the venerable law of sufficient reason and affirm that the same man in the same circumstances could do a different act. But any such implication, I take it, is not intended. Without any theory, we simply imagine ourselves back at the moment before the fatal decision had been taken, when both the right volition and the wrong one were still “possible,” because we had as yet decided for neither.

The familiar facts which I have just described are at the root of the free-will controversy. If all our volitions were of the simple ideo-motor type; if we were never thwarted by obstacles, never troubled by hesitation and doubt, never plagued by regrets; if we had always but a single line of action before us, and that one leading smoothly to immediate satisfaction, we should assuredly never raise the problem of free will, just as we should not doubt the rationality of the world or invent a devil to take the burden of evil off the

shoulders of God, if the world in every moment of experience appeared to us perfect.

Now the reader need not fear that I shall enmesh him anew in the tangled mazes of a controversy which has become a weariness even to philosophers. Rather, I think that both Determinists and Indeterminists, in the heat of the conflict, have lost sight of the very facts which had given rise to the problem. To use a convenient German phrase, the *Möglichkeit des Anderskönnens* is what stands in the way of complete Determinism; and until we make an attempt to deal satisfactorily with that, the controversy will ever break out afresh. To dub it an illusion because it clashes with some deterministic postulate is a high-handed and unphilosophical procedure. It will be more profitable to try and find out whether we cannot connect some intelligible meaning with the "possibility of acting otherwise." For whether we are determinists or not, we use the phrase; and if it means nothing, it is sad to think of how much willful nonsense philosophers and other learned people must be guilty.

So far as I am aware, no satisfactory attempt has yet been made to examine the conception of possibility here involved. And I offer the following remarks less in the hope of solving the problem than of drawing attention to it.

That the problem has been neglected is, I think, easy to show. When hard pressed, the defender of free will is indeed apt to fall back on the facts which I began by describing, and perhaps he will even invest them with special authority as "immediate" deliverances of consciousness, and try to put them, quite illegitimately, beyond the reach of investigation. But more usually, when he tries to argue, he begins by accepting Determinism and then sets himself to manufacture a sense of freedom which shall be consistent with that. And as the result of this effort at compromise we get self-determination. Now self-determination is a word of many meanings, and I have no wish to deny that some of them are valuable. For instance, as expressing that my actions are *my own* and not the effects of some force other than my will, it is a useful corrective of theories of "external" Determinism.

But tested by the problem which I regard as central, self-determination is *the problem itself* rather than its solution. It depends on whether we are in earnest about the *active* sense of "determination." The self determines itself to action—this is a good enough description of the process of decision and selection amongst alternatives. But do its defenders understand the phrase as implying the possibility of acting otherwise? I doubt it. Certainly the phrase is not usually regarded in that light. And I think I am right in saying that most thinkers who identify freedom with self-determination would deny that it includes a freedom to act otherwise.¹ In short, in all the so-called "reconciliations" of freedom with Determinism the latter gets the best of the bargain, in that it forces upon freedom its condition that possibilities shall be excluded. Self-determination is, from that point of view, merely a species of Determinism, working at bottom with the same conception of necessity, *viz.*: the conception that the actual alone is necessary and that *nothing beside the actual is even possible*. The self has determined itself to action and it could not have determined itself otherwise. And again, though the self may contemplate several actions as possible to it, the self is mistaken; only one action is "really" possible for it, *viz.*: the one on which it ultimately finds itself deciding.

If this position is challenged, we find it defended in the end by an appeal to the law of sufficient reason. That a different volition should be possible to the same person in the same situation seems an outrage on logic. Few have the courage of Professor James, who declares that a world *with* possibilities seems to him more rational than one *without*.² But, perhaps, there is no need thus to put postulate against postulate and to invoke the rationality of the universe

¹ This is perhaps the place to refer briefly to that *other* sense of freedom which identifies it with *moral* action, as with *rational* action, or with devotion to the common good, etc. It is clear that this sense of freedom (whatever its value) throws no light on the question, whether, in any case in which we preferred an immoral alternative, the moral one would have been possible.

² "The Will to Believe," p. 152.

for both sides of a contradiction. Perhaps an inquiry into the nature of possibility may help us out of the deadlock. At any rate, it will enable us to avoid the term "freedom" with its misleading associations. And it will have the further advantage of limiting the problem. For whatever conclusions we may reach, they will not concern volitions in general, but only those volitions in which the making up of our minds passes through the consideration of possibilities as a distinct stage.

When we say that we could have willed and performed a different act than the one which we did will and perform, we seem to imply that our actual behavior in its time and place was not necessary. And this at once gives rise to a difficulty. For the not necessary, it may be argued, is the impossible, and hence to say that another action than our real one was possible is to say that our real one was impossible, which is an obvious contradiction. To put it positively, the appeal is to the principle that *whatever is real is necessary, and, therefore, whatever is real is also the only thing possible*. For we naturally think of reality as determinate and necessary; and necessity we think of as uniform causal determination of consequent by antecedent event. In short, we identify reality with the actual "course of events" and include in this course all ideas, volitions, actions, and other psychical happenings. And if we possessed the complete knowledge requisite for filling out this scheme, we should attain our ideal, *viz.*: to eliminate possibilities altogether out of our thinking, in that every fact would be seen in its appointed place, and everything that was "really" possible would *ipso facto* be real. This is the position which Professor Simmel of Berlin, for instance, adopts in his *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*,³ and from which he argues that we speak of freedom only where so far we have failed to trace causal connections.

Now, if we accept as valid this conception of a "necessary" stream of events, we are clearly contradicting ourselves, if

³ E. g., Vol. I, p. 38, and *passim*

we arrest this stream at any one point and say: from this point onwards it *might* have been different. For to say that an event is necessary means that no other event could have been real in its place, and that means that the event is the only one possible. In fact, "real," "necessary" and "only possible" are, from this point of view, if not synonyms, at any rate merely different ways of expressing the same fact. And the principle claims to hold good not only for the past and the present, but also for the *future*. It involves not only that no past or present event could have been otherwise than it is; it implies also, that every future event, when it comes to be real, will be both necessary and the only possible event. There is, then, in the nature of things no room for alternatives; there are, and can be, no possibilities such as we were trying to assert. If human life with all its details, with its actions, thoughts, volitions, is adequately conceived as part of the "course of events," then we must say even now, that every act and every volition, whenever it does occur, will be necessary. And that means, as we have seen, that it will be the only possible one. Nor does it matter in the least whether in every case we are able to assign the cause, or formulate the law, of the psychical event. The principle, it would seem, has a right to stand against our ignorance of details.

But in thus identifying the realty, which (we say) is necessary and is alone possible, with the "actual course of events," we have so far kept out of sight a difficulty which we must now face. We have spoken as if the phrase "course of events" covered indifferently past, present, and future. But this seems to lead to startling conclusions, and to come into hopeless conflict with our habit of distinguishing the past, as "no longer real," and the future, as "not yet real," from the present, which is alone real. For we are inevitably forced to ask ourselves: *why* is the future, which we admit to be necessary, not yet real? Perhaps we attempt to reply: because the conditions for its realization are not yet complete. But why are these conditions incomplete? Because in turn the conditions of *their* realization are not yet complete. And thus we are

threatened with an infinite regress, an unending series of "not yet's," each of which is in turn responsible for the other. A is not yet, because B is not yet, and B is not yet, because C is not yet, and so on *ad infinitum*. But somewhere, surely, it may be thought, this backward procession of "not yet's" must be arrested, somewhere the future must issue from the present, somewhere we must touch the "is now." But, alas, the hope is vain. *The present never can contain all the conditions of the future.* For this is the dilemma by which we are faced: either the present contains all conditions of the future, and then we fail to explain why the future is still "future"—why it is "not yet," instead of being present now; or, if the present does not contain all the conditions, where are we to look for their completion except in the future? But it is unthinkable that the future, which it itself "not yet real," should make real the conditions of its own realization. And thus we have before us the unenviable choice between saying either that the future is real now, or that it can never become real at all. Nor can we escape from the dilemma by seeking in the past the reasons for the present incompleteness of the conditions of the future. For the past, clearly, is complete and fully realized. Else how could the present, according to the principle of causality, ever have become real? The very principle which seeks to make the reality of the present intelligible forbids us to find in the past a reason for the unreality of the future.

A very similar difficulty besets all attempts to find in the present a reason why the past should be "no longer real." And we seem fairly entitled to conclude that there is hopeless contradiction between the two arguments on which the opponents of possibility commonly rely, *viz.*: (1) That what is real is necessary and, therefore, the only thing possible; and (2) that this necessity of the real manifests itself in the succession of events. For they cannot avoid calling the present real in a sense in which neither past nor future are real, and yet they are unable to explain satisfactorily on the basis of the present either the unreality of the past or that of the future.

And the fallacy from which these difficulties spring is not far to seek. The "actual course of events" includes the past and future only, because it is itself through and through an "ideal construction" on the basis of the present. Given some present fact, we can, on the basis of experience and so far as that will carry us, infer its past causes and its future effects. Apart from such application to actual fact, causal connections are purely abstract and hypothetical. If A, then B, but whether A is or has been or will be, is another question. And in so far as past and future are reached by an inference from the present, they are themselves "ideal," and this explains why we speak of them as no longer and not yet real. Now, just in so far as the realization of the future depends on our volition, there is, so to speak, an "arrest" of the course of events. It must pass through our volition, and the direction of its continuation depends on our decision, and that decision consists in selecting one out of several possible alternatives.

So far, it is true, we have done nothing to explain positively this sense of possible. And perhaps we may not be able to do so. But at any rate we have rebutted the attempt to show the impossibility of possibilities on the ground that the real, which alone is both possible and necessary, is the actual course of events with its causal necessity.

The discussion up to this point has earned us the right to take our stand boldly on the present, and to leave aside all questions affecting the past. For the possibilities with which we have to deal in volition all refer to the future. They appear in our consciousness as ideas which will or will not be realized according as we decide about their fate. Of course, this realization depends partly on our physical powers, partly on external conditions, which may obstruct or assist us. Both these factors are variable, largely not under our control, and to a still larger extent not even accurately known by us. Of some ideas we know from experience that want of strength or unfavorable conditions make their realization impossible. Of many others we discover the impossibility in the attempt to realize them. And since our volition is thus limited, we

may, if we choose, even call it, so far, unfree. Yet these restrictions do not alter the fact that the ideas amongst which we make our choice come before us as possibilities, as ideas that are realizable by us. And though here, again, we may be restricted in that we cannot realize them all at once, or even one after the other, yet each, in itself, is possible.

Let us take our stand, then, at this point. We will not ask how just these ideas and no others came to be there, or what is the character of the agent and how it came to be what it is. We have to inquire simply in what sense any one of the alternatives that are before the agent prior to decision is "possible."

It will be convenient to call a possibility in so far as its realization depends on our volition a *practical* possibility, and to contrast it with *theoretical* possibility.⁴ And it will clear the way if we begin with a short discussion of theoretical possibility, since deliberation implies a large amount of theoretical reflection on theoretical possibilities. Thus we have to calculate our own mental and physical abilities, which are obviously facts of which in our decisions we must take account. Again, there is the external situation, with regard to which we have to ask both what changes we may expect as the result of our action, and what changes will happen irrespective of our action, and beyond the reach of our control or interference.⁵ In all these matters there is obviously room for more or less complete knowledge, and for much doubt and uncertainty.

Now statements of theoretical possibility range between two extremes, according to the direction of our interest. For we may be interested either, as in pure theory, in establishing universal connections of content, *i. e.*, in getting our knowledge into the form of scientific universal judgments; or we may be interested, as in the application of theory to practice, in the analysis of a given particular situation so

⁴ One might also use the terms *real* and *logical* possibility—*potentia* and *possibilitas*.

⁵ I have dealt with the bearing of these points on Determinism elsewhere, see "Mind," N. S. 56 (1905) pp. 464, 5.

as to trace in it, as fully as we can, the data which will enable us by means of our scientific knowledge to predict developments with more or less probability. In the former case we begin with "judgments of possibility." Thus when we say, "glass is brittle," or "hay is inflammable," we predicate of our subjects possible modifications. But the predicates attach to the subjects under conditions which are left unspecified. As Professor Bosanquet says:⁶ "The idea of 'possibility' is our substitute for the omitted conditions." If these conditions are fully and explicitly stated, all these judgments become scientific universals, as, *e. g.*, "water can be boiled," becomes "water boils at a temperature of 100 degrees." At this point possibility is, from the purely theoretical standpoint, wholly eliminated. For we have got now a universal connection of content, the necessity of which is most clearly conveyed by the hypothetical form: if A, then B. But our theoretical interest is satisfied only at a price. By becoming universal, our knowledge has become "ideal"—it seems to have left the solid ground of reality behind. We do, indeed, imply that our universals have some relation to reality, but we do not imply that, *as such*, they exist. A universal judgment, *e. g.*, may deal with the properties of water wherever water be found, and it may imply that water exists in *rerum natura*, but it does not assert that definite quantities of water exist *actually* at definite places. Our universals are, in Mr. Bradley's picturesque phrase, "divorced" from reality, though our best knowledge of reality is enshrined in them. Now, this abstract and hypothetical nature of knowledge makes itself felt the moment we apply our universal connections to particular cases, as they come before us in feeling and sense-perception. For, then, at once the inexhaustible complexity of the given makes itself felt as a disturbing factor. We can never be sure beyond the reach of all doubt that the actual case of experience is as "pure" as the hypothetical case of our science; nor can we know what disturbing factors there may be in the total context as part of which the given case

⁶ "Logic," I, p. 388.

appears before us. And this introduces an element of uncertainty, of which we cannot say that human knowledge will ever overcome or eliminate it. The moment we leave the abstract and hypothetical ground of science, the limitation of our knowledge forces itself painfully on our notice. The distinction of what is irrelevant and what is essential, on which our science is largely built up, shows itself to be purely provisional, and a matter of degree. In dealing with the real, as given in perception, we never have the *whole* facts fully before us, and, therefore, all our judgments must be affected more or less with uncertainty; they will forecast not so much what *will*, as what *may*, happen.

Still, even such knowledge is valuable and, indeed, indispensable as a guide to action. And, hence, that second form of our interest in theoretical possibility, *viz.*: the interest in inferring from the data of a particular case the possible developments which we may expect. Here, again, possibility is a matter of degree, which with complete knowledge would pass into certainty. Thus, we can say of a given human being that it is possible for him to die within the next twenty-four hours. We may have no special grounds for expecting his death, but the general mortality of human nature makes it more or less remotely possible. But if we find him to be suffering from an acute disease, or about to enter on some perilous enterprise, we have at once definite conditions facilitating definite modes of death, and the individual's death within the time limit is so much *more* possible. But absolute certainty as to the future is unattainable, though we come near to it, *e. g.*, in some astronomical predictions.

I have spoken here exclusively of possibilities with regard to the future, because they form the *meeting-point* of the theoretical and practical senses of possibility. Theoretical possibility, as we have seen, is an expression of incomplete knowledge. But even if our knowledge were complete, the future (as we may see by comparing it with the past) would be "possible" in a further and different sense. It is *practically* possible in the sense that it is still *realizable*.

And now we are ready for an important step in the argu-

ment. *The realization of the future implies a dynamic conception of the present.* Unless we invest the present with the power or force to realize the future, it is clear that nothing would happen at all, no movement, no process, no succession, no time, and consequently no distinction of present and future. If our knowledge were absolutely complete, so that we could foresee the future with certainty down to the last detail, yet this whole scheme would remain future and ideal, and never become present and real, unless there were in the present reality a dynamic energy for the realization of its own future stages. If we do not assume this, there is no reason why, even though the complete antecedent conditions of an event were present, the event itself should come to pass. To explain *that*, we must introduce the idea of life or movement or force into our static connections of content. And this is the reason why all attempts to find in the present, regarded simply as a given content, the *full* conditions of the future, were bound to fail. For the present, as such, leads to nothing further, unless we introduce surreptitiously a dynamic conception. I maintain that we ought to introduce it openly and explicitly. For the conception of force or power or life is nothing but the expression of "real" possibility. It means simply that the present "potentially" contains the future, *i. e.*, it has the power to realize it, to turn it from possible into actual. And now let us add that so far as *we* possess such power as conscious agents, it manifests itself in *volition*.

There is, however, one important difference between our volition and the force or power to which we ascribe the movement of a non-volitional process. In volition the power is aware, so to speak, of its own direction, for it has the future before it in the shape of an idea to realize. But what are we to say of the future stages of any natural process, to which we cannot ascribe consciousness and a knowledge of its own direction? Must we say that possibilities, being ideal, exist only for the human mind; that the development of a chemical process which we may be watching in a laboratory, or the growth of a plant, or an animal, or any future constellation of the solar system, exists only as an ideal anticipation

for a human observer? That, I think, would give to these possibilities a false subjectivity, and introduce a distinction, for which we have no warrant, between our perception of the present "real" stage of a process and our idea of its "possible" continuation. For the perception, too, is for us, is for an observing mind; it is not the object undergoing the process which observes and perceives itself. And yet we predicate the content of perception of the object, we judge it to be true; we "refer it to reality." Just so we must refer our ideas of the future development of a given process to that process; we must judge them true of it; we must affirm that their content or meaning is part of *its* nature. We cannot restrict that nature simply to what we find within the four corners, so to speak, of any single moment of its existence. If a plant possessed consciousness and ideas, no doubt it would anticipate in idea its own development just as we to some extent anticipate ours. Now, it is true that we have no grounds for crediting it with such a conscious anticipation of its own future, but, on the other hand, though the future may not be *for* the plant, it is yet *of* it, it is part of its very nature to develop in a given direction. Perhaps the most convenient word for expressing that the power of realizing the future which we had to ascribe to the present involves in its nature a certain direction, is *tendency*. For without implying consciousness or will, "tendency" yet suggests that it is part of the present nature of a given process to complete itself in a certain direction. How natural this way of speaking is may be seen from the fact that, in explaining ideo-motor action, we commonly ascribe to all ideas that can suggest action a "tendency" to realize themselves.

However, I am content to suggest rather than to press these points. That the task of forming an adequate conception of the relation of present to future in all processes in which consciousness does not play a part, is difficult cannot be denied. But most of these difficulties vanish when we turn to our own volition and to the problem of practical possibility. In volition we have the nearest and clearest case of the

realization of possibilities. For there we experience⁷ within ourselves a contrast between present existence and various possible modifications of it, one of which is to be realized by us. Let us take a simple example: a thirsty man reflecting whether or no he shall drink from the fountain, has a concrete experience, which in its totality includes on the one hand a consciousness of his present self as thirsty, and on the other two possible ideal selves, one a self satisfied by drinking, the other a self which, for some reason or another, has passed on still athirst. This is the situation in the agent's mind, prior to decision; and if we reflect on it, we must surely be once more brought to the conclusion that the self which we here call **present and real** as opposed to the ideal selves, does not contain the full cause of the realization of either of these ideal selves. It is only out of the total situation that the decision issues. The ideal selves by their conflict with the present contribute to the result, for which the present alone is not enough to account. In admitting this we leave necessity in the sense of determination of succeeding by antecedent event far behind. This, with its assumption of a simple succession of elements, fails to work when applied to such a complex situation.

However, the determinist who would deny possibilities may return to the charge. He may say: "I grant you your analysis. I grant you that a decision, in a case like this, can be reached only by a consideration of possibilities, by the agent imagining that it is in his power not merely to do, but to will either of the alternatives between which his choice lies. But you must admit that of the two 'possibilities' *only one* becomes actual, only one is realized. All I say is that there must be a reason for the realization of this one in preference to the other. And whatever the reason may be, *where there is a reason, there is necessity*. And if the realization of the one possibility is thus necessary, it is plain that the other possibility can never have been really possible at all."

⁷ Lest the reader be misled, I remind him that I am speaking only of those highly developed cases of volition where we have deliberation on alternatives. I use the general term for the sake of shortness.

The argument really amounts to the paradox that the illusion of more than one alternative being possible is necessary for the realization of the alternative which alone is really possible. But to what sort of necessity are we here appealing when we say that the illusion is necessary? It looks remarkably like a necessity of "brute fact." That we think of alternatives as possible cannot be denied; that these possibilities *are* possible is against the theory. Hence, we cut the knot by declaring them to be not only illusions, but necessary illusions.

It is always a bad sign when a theory can only save itself by declaring one half of the facts for which it has to account as illusion.

But, we may be told, the character determines the decision, and a given character can consistently decide only in one way, and not in another. And we are threatened here with the law of contradiction.

Now, to say that the character determines the action is vague. How do we conceive this determination? At any rate the character is not an event anteceding the action in time. The determination, then, is not causal. Perhaps, then, the character is the ground of the action: it "expresses" or "manifests" itself in the action. But let us make sure what we mean by character. Is it more than a generalized inference from the action itself? From a given act we argue that the same man under the same circumstances will do the same act again. Hence, it is the "character" of that man to do such acts under such circumstances. But this, plainly, does not help us. It is an argument from completed volition, which throws no light on the sense in which alternatives are "possible" prior to decision.

And further, if on the one side we often say that character determines action, we no less frequently affirm that *action determines character*. If the character, as it stands, fully accounts for the action, it is hard to see how the action can help to form the character. There are, then, actions which cannot be traced to character, unless we use the word with a shiftiness which in philosophy is almost criminal.

Besides, what we call our character is largely made up of habits. And, however difficult it may be, it is possible both to acquire and to break down habits by a volition directed to that end. Did I say "possible"? It seems impossible to speak of the will without using the word. Is that merely a bad habit, which as good determinists we should set ourselves to eradicate—because it is "possible" to do so? Why not say boldly that "possibilities" belong to the essence of the will?

Thus, to the assertion that only one alternative is compatible with a given character and that, therefore, it alone is possible, we may reply, that the character is not absolutely fixed and determined apart from the action, if the action reacts on it and modifies it.

And there is a better argument against this appeal to compatibility. When we return to our analysis of a volition and ask how the character of the agent operates, we find that it expresses itself in the *nature of the ideas which appeal to the agent as possible*, and in the reasons pro and con, which he brings forward in considering each possibility. Of course, this is a matter of degree: some ideas appeal more strongly than others. And, no doubt, the realization of one possibility would contradict certain interests or sides of our nature which incline us rather to another possibility. So far there is incompatibility, but it is not the action which is incompatible with the character, but various sides of the character which are incompatible with one another. And these aspects do not necessarily become compatible, by one of them being carried out in action. In the majority of cases action means *one-sided* realization of character, and so far as the other sides are repressed and sacrificed, the action can hardly be called compatible with the *whole* character.

I should say, then, that in so far as any idea attracts us at all, it is because in its realization a certain side of our character would express itself. Alternatives come before us in deliberation as each embodying one aspect of our nature, and, in consequence, we think of each as compatible with ourselves. And that is an important part of our meaning

when we speak of them as "possible." No doubt, if I decide to carry out A and not B, myself as realized in A is different from myself as realized in B. But whichever I decide on, it is still "I" who decide. In other words, in deliberating and deciding I never look upon the alternatives as if the realization of one were alone compatible with the maintenance of my self-identity, whereas the realization of every other would destroy it. On this point I must ask every reader to judge from his own experience. To me at any rate, it seems, that whilst it does make a difference to the self which alternative is realized, the difference does not go deep enough to destroy the sense of self-identity. On the contrary, it is remarkable how much variety and change is compatible with a consciousness of identity.

Finally, it may be said, that one alternative only is possible, because it alone is compatible with the "true" self or the "higher" self, and that all other alternatives would contradict *that* self. But this argument shifts the discussion to another ground, and it is irrelevant unless it be meant to assert, in the teeth of facts like repentance and self-criticism, that every volition is, *ipso facto*, a realization of the "true" self. And this position will have to be seriously maintained first, before it is worth while to reply to it.

However, the mention of it suggests another consideration. I will assume that the argument so far is inconclusive; that whilst we think of alternatives as "possible," it has not been made out whether this be illusion or truth. Let us, then, turn for a moment to those characteristic cases where, in self-reproach, we express retrospective disapproval of what we have done, and contrast with it the better act which we *might* have done. It seems to me that the fact of our asserting so emphatically the possibility of the *better* act, is not without significance. If our reason—as we have been told since the days of Plato and Aristotle—in thinking and in willing moves *sub ratione boni*, may we not say that the postulate of the rationality of the universe involves, at the least, that the good should be "possible" even where it is not actually realized? Evil, like error, always appears to us in its own

nature irrational. It may have its *causes*, but we cannot find a *ground* why it should be there. If we could find a ground, the existence of evil would justify itself to our reason. On the other hand, if we fail to find a ground for a fact, we treat that fact as irrational and not necessary. Hence, I am inclined to say that wherever *we disapprove we implicitly challenge the necessity of the fact of which we disapprove*. This is at the bottom of the familiar conflict between what "is" and what "ought to be." If we condemn what exists, we, so to speak, deny its right to be there. And this condemnation, except where it refers to the past, normally becomes a practical attitude, and issues in the effort to remove the offending fact.

I am conscious that the lines of thought which I have tried to indicate in this paper would deserve to be supported by more coercive arguments than I have been able to adduce. I have aimed at suggestion rather than at conviction. And whether or no I have succeeded in making out a positive meaning for the conception of possibility in its relation to conduct, there is one point which I regard as certain. And I will, in conclusion, briefly restate it. When we regard alternatives in conduct as possible, we do not mean to express ignorance or incomplete knowledge. We do not mean that, if our knowledge were complete, we should know before decision how we were going to decide: For this amounts to saying *that volition itself is merely a form of ignorance*, and that with complete knowledge we should cease to will: we should at best be aware of ourselves as moving (or as being moved: it would make no difference) along a line every detail of which was clearly mapped out before us. We should be conscious of our present state, conscious also of the only development of which that state was capable, and conscious finally of the realization of that development. But I do not think that we should recognize such an experience as will.⁸

In short, then, will is not a form of ignorance, nor a theoretical attitude at all. Hence, a conception of possibility

⁸ I may refer to a similar argument in Sidgwick's "Methods of Ethics," ch. V, p. 66.

formed for theoretical purposes, is not necessarily identical with the conception of possibility which arises on the basis of volition. We have no right to treat the possibilities of will as if they were theoretical assertions. In the end we cannot explain will by any categories, except those which the volitional experience itself suggests. This was clearly seen by Sigwart, and I cannot do better than conclude by a quotation:⁹ "That alone is possible in the completely objective sense which is removed from the sphere of necessity as the manifestation of free subjects." And Sigwart goes on to point out that it is not a question of the metaphysical truth of this view, but of the presuppositions which lead to the thought of possibility in this sphere of experience. In other words, taking the volitional experience as it stands, it consists in the practical determination of the undetermined. And the practically undetermined is the possible in conduct.

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THE UNSATISFACTORINESS OF THE CLASSIFICATION OF DUTIES AND VIRTUES
IN MANY OF THE MODERN
TREATISES ON ETHICS.¹

In the early part of the classic "System of Logic," by John Stuart Mill, there is a striking criticism on the part of the author with regard to the list of the "Categories" in the form in which it had come down through the Middle Ages from Aristotle. He speaks of this as a "mere catalogue of the distinctions rudely marked out by the language of familiar life," and refers to it as being "both redundant and defective." "Some objects," as he says, "are omitted and others repeated several times under different headings. It is

⁹ "Logic," Eng. Transl., § 34, p. 203.

¹ The author of this article, the late Walter L. Sheldon, founder and lecturer of the Ethical Society of St. Louis, died June 5th, 1907. This is the last paper he prepared for publication.